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ASTRONOMICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL CONJECTURES ON A PASSAGE IN HOMER.

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Homerus Divinarum omnium Inventionum Fons et Origo. Macrob.

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ASTRONOMICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL CONJECTURES ON A PASSAGE IN HOMER.

SOME of the graveſt perſons of antiquity*, and of the greateſt reputation for learning, have not thought it inconſiſtent with their characters to write comments upon *Homer*. The reaſon was this: He was ſuppoſed not only to give the hiſtory of the war he wrote upon, but likewiſe to contain great treaſures of *moral* and *political* wiſdom. Among other paſſages of that Poet, which ſeem not yet ſuf-

* As *Porphyry*, a learned heathen, who lived under the Emperor *Aurelian*, about *A. D.* 270, and *Euſtathius*, Archbiſhop of *Theſſalonica*, who lived under the Emperor *Manuel*, who died *A. D.* 1180.

 ficiently

ficiently explained, none perhaps merits greater attention than that where *Thetis*, as ſhe tells *Achilles*, could not, at preſent, lay her Petition before *Jupiter*,

> Ζεὺς γὰρ ἐπ' Ὠκεανὸν μετ' ἀμύμονας Αἰθιοπῆας
> Χθιζὸς ἔβη μετὰ δαῖτα· θεοὶ δ' ἅμα πάντες ἕποντο
> Δωδεκάτῃ δέ τοι αὖθις ἐλεύσεται Οὐλυμπόνδε. *

Jupiter enim in Oceanum ad inculpatos Æthiopas
Heſternus abiit ad Convivium, & Dii ſimul omnes ſequuti ſunt.
Duodecima autem rurſus veniet in Cœlum.

In theſe lines there ſeems to be included ſome mythological meaning †, but what that is doth not very eaſily appear. Having heard the queſtion frequently aſked, I ſhall here ſpend a few words in endeavouring to ſatisfy *myſelf*, at leaſt.

I ſhall proceed gently, and obſerve in the firſt place, that it is not always clear who are the people meant by the ancients under the term *Ethiopians*. *Cepheus*, the father of *Andromeda*, according to *Euripides*, as he is cited by *Era-*

* Iliad I. v. 425.

† Homerus divinarum omnium inventionum fons & origo, ſub poetici nube figmenti verum ſapientibus intelligi dedit, Jovem cum Diis cæteris, id eſt cum Stellis, profectum in Oceanum, Æthiopibus eum ad Epulas invitantibus. Per quam imaginem fabuloſam Homerum ſignificaſſe volunt hauriri de humoribus nutrimenta ſideribus. *Macrob. Somn. Scip. L. 2. c. 10.*

toſthenes

toſthenes in his *Aſteriſms**, was *King of the Ethiopians*. And yet the ſcene of that fable, according to *Strabo*, was placed by ſome in the neighbourhood of *Joppa*, in *Paleſtine* †. The *African Ethiopians* in *Homer*'s days were but little, if at all known, more than by name, to the *Greeks*. They had then but little commerce and acquaintance even with *Egypt* itſelf, and, of courſe, muſt know much leſs of a people that lay ſo far beyond it. The conqueſt of *Egypt* by the *Perſians* afterwards, indeed, opened a way to the knowlege of that part of the world. But how ſlender that knowlege was, even under them, appears from *Herodotus*. *Diodorus Siculus* ‡, it is true, ſpeaks of the religious manners of the *African Ethiopians*, and quotes theſe very lines in proof of his aſſertion. But this only ſhews, that, in his time, theſe lines were ſo underſtood, and when the term *Ethiopians* was, in a manner, grown obſolete as to any other people.

But there were *Aſiatic Ethiopians*, as well as *African*. *Diodorus Siculus* || ſays, that "*Semiramis* over-ran moſt part of "*Ethiopia*." This may be true of a people in *Aſia*, ſo called, but is not at all probable if underſtood of the other, and of whom, perhaps, *Semiramis* had not ſo much as heard.

* At the end of the *Oxford* edition of *Aratus*.

† *Strabo*, pag. 1100, *Edit. Amſtel.* 1707. *Plin. Nat. Hiſt. Lib.* V. *c.* 13.

‡ Pag. 144. *Edit. Rhodoman.* 1604.

|| Τῆς Αἰθιοπίας ἐπῆλθε τὰ πλεῖστα. Pag. 102.

In the liſt of forces that invaded *Greece*, under *Xerxes*, *Herodotus* * mentions the "*Eaſtern Ethiopians*," whom he expreſly diſtinguiſhes from the other in *Africa* †. And *Xenophon* ‡, giving the extent of *Cyrus*'s vaſt empire, tells us, that it was "bounded to the ſouth by *Ethiopia*." For *Chaldea* and the territory of *Babylon*, as we are informed by *Strabo* ‖, reached as far as the *Perſian Gulph*.

It is this *Ethiopia* and its inhabitants that *Lucian* muſt be underſtood as ſpeaking of, when he tells us that the "*Ethio-*" *pians* firſt took notice of the heavenly motions, and, by find-" ing out the cauſes of the lunations, diſcovered that the Moon " had no proper light of her own, but borrowed it from the " Sun." But what the *Greeks* knew of the Moon's motion, and the method of predicting Eclipſes, came to them from the *Babylonians*, as well as the *Pole*, the *Gnomon*, and the *Diviſion of the Day* into *twelve* Parts.

For the laſt part of this aſſertion, we have the expreſs authority of *Herodotus* ¶. And with the former part agrees *Geminus*, in *Petavius*'s *Uranologion* **, and the famous paſſage in *Plato*'s *Epinomis*. For ſpeaking there of Aſtronomy, he ſays, "the " firſt that obſerved theſe things was a *Barbarian*, who lived

* Οι ἀπ' Ηλίε Ανατολέων Αιθίοπες. Pag. 405. Edit. Gronov. 1715.
† Δικοὶ γὰρ δὴ ἱρεαλεύονλο. *Ibid.*
‡ Cyropæd. Pag. 660, Edit. Oxon. 4to. 1727.
‖ Pag. 1074, Edit. Amſtel. 1707.
¶ Pag. 127. ** Pag. 61.

" in

" in an ancient country, where, on account of the clearneſs of " the ſummer ſeaſon, they could firſt diſcover them. Such are " *Egypt* and *Syria*, where the Stars are clearly ſeen, there " being neither rain nor clouds to hinder their proſpect. And " becauſe we [*Greeks*] are more remote from this ſummer " clearneſs of weather, than the *Barbarians*, we came later to " the knowlege of theſe Stars."

Theſe *Ethiopians* are in Scripture, for the moſt part, known by the term *Cuſh*. A term of very large extent, and ſeldom, if ever, applied to the *Ethiopians* above *Egypt*. For *Moſes*, we are told, married a *Midianite* *, but *Numb.* 12th ſhe is ſtiled a *Cuſhite*, tranſlated by the LXX. Αἰθιόπισσαν.

In the Hiſtory of *Hezekiah* †, it is ſaid that *Sennacherib* was obliged to ſuſpend his enterpriſe againſt *Jeruſalem*, becauſe he had heard " that *Tirhakah*, king of *Ethiopia*, was come out to " fight with him." But this could by no means be the *African Ethiopian*, who lay at too great a diſtance. It could not be to ſuccour *Hezekiah*, becauſe *Egypt* was much nearer, and at that time in alliance with him, and was applied to by him for aſſiſtance, as appears from the rebuke in Iſaiah, ch. xxxi. But that ſome neighbouring prince, called an *Ethiopian*, ſhould take advantage of *Sennacherib*'s abſence, and invade his dominions, is not at all unlikely. And it may not be improbable, at leaſt, to ſuppoſe the territories of this prince to have lain on

* Act. Apoſt. ch. vii. v. 29. † Iſaiah, ch. xxxvii. v. 9.

the

the eaſtern bank of the *Tigris*. For we find, Iſaiah xi. that *Cuſh* is joined with *Elam*, which did ſo, as well as with *Babylon*. And this ſeems yet farther likely to have been the caſe from the firſt ſyllable in this prince's Name. For in the *Perſian* language, the word *Tîr* ſignifies an *arrow*, and from thence is the name given by that People to the river *Tigris*, on account of its *rapidity*. That the word *Tîr* was uſed in the compoſition of *Perſic* proper names, appears from that of *Tiridates*, and others that might be mentioned. And we have the name of the ſame river making part of the name of an *Aſſyrian* prince, *Tiglath-Pileſer*. For *Diglath*, or, according to the more aſpirated pronunciation of the *Aſſyrians*, *Tiglath*, was the name given by them to the *Tigris*.

The word *hack*, or *hak*, in the *Perſic* language, ſignifies *multus*. So that *Tirhakah*, the *overflowing Tigris*, might have been a name given to this prince from his *conqueſts*, though we are not acquainted with them.

The *Ethiopians* are called by the *Arabian* hiſtorians *Habaſh*. But this ſame word is by them expreſsly applied likewiſe to a people of *Arabia Felix*. It was a king of theſe *Habaſh* that inſulted the temple at *Mecca**, the year that *Mohammed* was born. It was to a king of theſe *Habaſh*†, moſt likely, that *Mohammed* ſent (if he ſent any) meſſengers to invite him to em-

* Gagnier. Præfat. in Vit. Mohammed. cap. 45, 46. Edit. Gagnier. 1723.

† Abulfedæ Vit. Moham.

brace

brace his religion. And laſtly, it muſt have been theſe *Habaſh*, and not the *African*, that, according to *Abdol-Baki* ‡, entertained *Mohammed* at *Mecca* with a dance.

There were, therefore, *Aſiatic*, as well as *African Cuſh*, *Habaſh*, or *Ethiopians*. And, conſidering how narrow the paſſage is over at the Straits of *Babelmandub*, it is no ways abſurd to ſuppoſe the *Africans* were a colony of the other, and that *Ethiopia*, now properly ſo called, was peopled in that manner. *Abulfeda* ‖ ſays the paſſage is ſo narrow, that a perſon on the ſhore on one ſide, may eaſily ſee another on the oppoſite ſide.

Homer's *Ethiopians*, therefore, are, moſt probably, to be ſought for in *Aſia*, and might be borderers upon the territories of *Babylon*, if they were not *Babylonians* themſelves. For that he knew of theſe *Aſiatic Ethiopians* is plain from what he ſays at the beginning of the *Odyſſey* * ;

Αἰθίοπας, τοὶ διχθὰ δεδαίαται, ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν,
Οἱ μὲν δυσομένου Ὑπερίονος, οἱ δ' ἀνιόντος.

Æthiopas, qui bifariam diviſi ſunt, ultimi hominum,
Alii quidem ad occidentalem ſolem, alii vero ad orientalem.

It was obſerved above, that the *Greeks* borrowed from the *Babylonians* the method of dividing the day into twelve parts. If

‡ MSS. in Bibliothec. Bod. Oxon. Vol. III. p. 71.

‖ Hudſ. Geog. Min.

* Lib. 1. v. 23.

it be aſked how the *Babylonians*, themſelves, came to *divide* the day into this number of parts, rather than any other, the anſwer ſeems to be, that it was done in conformity to the diviſion of the year into the ſame. For *twelve* lunations being ſuppoſed equal to *one* revolution of the ſun, it was natural to divide the year into *twelve* parts, and the *ecliptic*, the ſun's apparent annual path, into the *like*.

But one year is one *ſyſtem of days*, and therefore, in the *prophetic* ſtyle, ſometimes repreſented as *one day*. This is particularly obſervable in the Book of *Daniel*, which was wrote at *Babylon*, under the *Jewiſh* captivity there. But there are inſtances of this method of computation much earlier than this. For, when *Rebecca** ſent her ſon *Jacob* to *Padan Aram*, ſhe bade him go and ſtay with *Laban*, not *a few days*, as our tranſlation hath it, but *one days*, one *ſyſtem of days*, or *one year*. For as the journey could not be performed in a *few* days, ſo neither would the abſence of a *few* days anſwer the purpoſe of his being ſent away.

But a *month* is likewiſe a *ſyſtem of days*, and, in the *Chaldee* ſtyle, may be termed *ſhanah*, as well as a year, or twelve months. In *Diodorus Siculus*†, the year, among the *Egyptians*, is ſaid to have conſiſted, originally, of *one month* only, and the obſervation, perhaps, may be extended to *Chaldea*, as there ſeems

* Gen. ch. xxvii. v. 44. † L. 1. pag. 22. See too the authors cited in the notes on Cenſorin. de Die Nat. Cap. 19.

to

to have been a great affinity between the aſtronomy of the two nations*.

As a year, then, of *twelve months*, was *one days*, ſo, in the ſame ſtyle, would a year of *one month* be *one days*. But as this could not be expreſſed in the *Greek* language, they would, perhaps, call it *one day*. At leaſt, a poet might do ſo, and eſpecially ſuch a poet as *Homer*, abounding in figure and mythology.

An inſtance of this, I think, we have in the word Ζεὺς, in the paſſage under conſideration. The *Greeks* themſelves derive the word from ζέω, *ferveo*. But the origin of it, perhaps, muſt be ſought for much higher, and it may be looked on as equivalent to the *Dai*, or *Di* of the *Hebrews*, the *Du* of the *Arabians*, nay, what is more, the *Dyu* of the *Welſh*, the *Deu* of the *Corniſh*, the *Dûe* of the *Armoric*, the *Dia* of the *Old Iriſh*, and laſtly, the *Deus* of the *Latins*. All theſe ſignify *Lord*, or *Poſſeſſor*, and therefore are equivalent to the word *Baal*, the idolatrous term for the *Sun* in Scripture.

Another remark to be made here is, that the *peſtilence* falling into the *Grecian* camp before *Troy* ſeems to have been a *real* fact, the hiſtory, or tradition of which, had been preſerved to *Homer*'s time. This, ſtript of fable, is properly enough referred to

* Diodorus Siculus tells us, φασὶ δὲ καὶ τὺς ἐν Βαβυλῶνι Χαλδαίους, ἀπόικους Αἰγυπτίων ὄντας, τὴν δόξαν ἔχειν τὴν περὶ τῆς Ἀστρολογίας, παρὰ τῶν Ἱερέων μαθόντας τῶν Αἰγυπτίων. Chaldæos *etiam in* Babylonia, Ægyptiorum *colonos eſſe, & a* ſacerdotibus aſtrologiam *edoctos, eò celebritatis perveniſſe adſerunt.* Lib. 1. pag. 73. But this, conſidering the progreſs of ſcience, is hardly probable.

Apollo, the *Sun*, or the heat of the ſeaſon, which therefore was about *July*, or the beginning of *Auguſt*, when the heats are greateſt. It was therefore paſt the *Summer Solſtice*, but not very long after; upon which account *Homer* ſays that *Jupiter*, or the *Sun*, was gone χθιζὸς, *a day or two ago*. That is, he was gone towards the *winter tropic*; towards the *ſouthermoſt* part of his orbit; and therefore towards the vertex of thoſe people that lived in the ſouthermoſt part of the known world. He was gone therefore μετ' ἀμύμονας Αἰθιοπῆας. Theſe people lay towards the top of the *Perſian* Gulph, and therefore ἐπ' Ὠκεανὸν; were *borderers* upon the ſea, and ſo, as he deſcribes them, were ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν, *hominum remotiſſimi*.

When *Jupiter*, or the *Sun*, is ſaid to have been gone μετὰ Δαῖτα, *to a feaſt*, it may ſeem, at firſt ſight, to be nothing more than embelliſhment, was it not true that theſe people had a feſtival about the time of the *Winter Solſtice*, called *Sakeh*. Σακαία, ἡ Σκυθικὴ Ἑορτὴ, ſays *Heſychius*. But the *Scythia* of the ancients is of very uncertain extent. Or it might be called a *Scythian Feaſt*, becauſe it was celebrated, as *Strabo* ſays *, Σκυθικὶ, *after the Scythian manner*, that is, with all manner of intemperance and debauchery.

The occaſion of this feſtival, according to ſome, was a victory obtained by *Cyrus* † over the *Sacæ*. Others ſay it was inſtituted by the *Perſian* governors ‡ near the *Euxine* Sea, and on account

* Pag. 780. Edit. Amſtel. † Strabo, ut ſup. ‡ Strabo, pag. 779.

of

of a like victory over the *Sacæ*. But the word *Sakeh*, in the *Chaldee* language, ſignifies nothing more than *Compotatio**, or a *feſtival* in general. The victory gained by *Cyrus* over the *Sacæ* hath the air of a fiction, and perhaps was invented only to account for the *name* of this feſtival, a name which the *Greeks* did not underſtand.

It is, more probably, a *Babylonian* feſtival, and much older than the time of *Cyrus*. And accordingly we have a much better account of it in *Athenæus*† from *Beroſus*. For he tells us that "*Beroſus*, in the 1ſt book of his *Babylonics*, ſays, that at *Babylon* was held a feaſt called *Sakea*, on the 16th day of the month *Lous*, which held five days. That it was then cuſtomary for the ſervants to govern their maſters. That one of them, during that time, had the direction of the whole family, and wore a ſort of royal robe called *Zoganes*." This feaſt, adds *Athenæus*, is mentioned likewiſe by *Cteſias*, in the 2d book of his *Perſic* Hiſtory.

Beroſus wrote his hiſtory, according to Biſhop *Stillingfleet*‡, at ſooneſt, under *Antiochus Soter*. If it was at the beginning of his reign, it was about the year before Chriſt 280. This therefore is the oldeſt mention that we find made of this feaſt, for *Cteſias* is loſt.

* Hence *Xenophon*, in his *Cyropædia*, Lib. 1. hath coined the name of an officer in the court of *Media*, called *Sacas*, whom he makes to be *cup-bearer* to *Aſtyages*.

† Deipnoſoph. L. 14. See likewiſe at the end of *Herodotus*, pag. 673.

‡ Orig. Sacr. pag. 34. See *Weid.* Hiſt. Aſtron. pag. 34. *Petavius* places him under *Alexander the Great*. The difference is but about fifty years at moſt.

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The month *Lous* is the 10th in the *Macedonian* year. And as *Beroſus* lived under the *Syromacedon* kings, it is no wonder that he uſes the name of a *Syromacedon* month. The *Macedonians*, according to *Cardinal Noris* *, began their year at the *autumnal equinox*, by which way of reckoning, the month *Lous* will anſwer to part of the *Roman June*. But the author of the 1ſt book of *Maccabees*, who uſes the *æra* of the *Seleucidæ*, begins the year at the *vernal equinox*. So did the people of *Antioch*, the capital of the *Syromacedon* monarchy, according to *Vaillant* †. And for this reaſon, as may be ſeen in *Cardinal Noris* ‡, on the reverſe of the coins of that city, we have the ſign *Aries*, and over its back the *Sun* and *Moon*, "*obviis* Antiochiæ *ſymbolis*," ſays he. According to this computation, which *Beroſus* is moſt likely to have followed, the month *Lous* muſt have anſwered to part of the *Roman December*, and this feaſt, as it reſembled, we have ſeen, the *Saturnalia* of that people, was probably celebrated at the firſt full moon after the *Winter Solſtice* §. The days were now at the ſhorteſt, and this might be deſigned to expreſs their joy at the proſpect of the ſpring returning.

* De epoch. Syromaced. p. 2. † Hiſt. Reg. Syriæ, pag. 342. See his preface too. ‡ Ut ſup. pag. 182.

§ The *Saturnalia* of the *Romans* were kept, at firſt, only *one* day, and that was the 14*th* of the *Calends* of *January*, or *December* the 19*th*. But the number was afterwards increaſed to *three*, *four*, *five*, and ſome ſay *ſeven* days, as we learn from *Lipſ. Saturnal.* L. 1. c. 3. or *Kennett's Roman Antiq.* pag. 96.

In the old *Roman Calendar*, publiſhed by *Petavius* in his *Uranologion*, the *Saturnalia* are placed on the 16*th* of the *Calends* of *January*, or *December* the 17*th*, which is likewiſe made the day of the *Winter Solſtice*. But in another *Calendar*, publiſhed by him in the ſame place, the *Saturnalia* are placed on the 16*th* of the *Calends* of *January*, and the *Winter Solſtice* the day after.

As *Babylon*, we are well assured, was taken by *Cyrus* at a feast ‖, this might be the feast as likely as any other. And the preserving the memory of this would be a better reason for continuing the observance of it under the *Persians*, than that given above from *Strabo*. And if the *Babylonians* and *Syrians* under their *own kings* began their year at the *vernal equinox*, there is a good reason why they continued to do so under the *Macedonian* princes, adopting only the names of the months.

When *Jupiter*, now supposed to be the Sun, is said by *Homer* to be attended to this feast by *all the Gods*, it may be understood of all the *planets*, known, perhaps, at that time to have a *motion* of their *own*, though their periods might not have been, so early, even tolerably settled.

But besides the *planets* which *Diodorus* * says the *Chaldeans* called by the same names as the *Greeks* did, they had *thirty*

‖ See the book of *Daniel*, ch. v. ver. 1. and *Herodotus*, who says that the town was taken at one end while those that inhabited the middle knew nothing of the matter, τυχεῖν γάρ σφι ἔτεον ὄρτην, χορεύειν τε τότον τὸν χρόνον, καὶ ἐν εὐπαθείῃσι εἶναι· pag. 77. It seems to have been a general, and therefore an annual festival. And the time here spoken of may have been the feast, as the time of the year seems to agree with it. For *Cyrus* marched against *Babylon* in the spring, according to *Herodotus*, pag. 76, and routed the *Babylonians* in an open engagement, who, upon that, shut themselves up in the town. *Cyrus* lay some time before it, and then thought of the stratagem by which he took it.

* Pag. 116. Edit. *Rhodoman*. In what sense this is true I have explained, at large, in another place. The *thirty* stars here spoke of by *Diodorus*, seem to have presided each over *one* of the *days* of the *month*. And from their *risings* and *settings*, the *Chaldeans* seem to have formed *astrological* or *genethliacal* conclusions. And hence they gave them the title of *Gods of the Council*, if the *Greeks* rightly understood them.

other

other ſtars, which they called θεὸι βυλαίοι, *Gods of the Council*. To theſe they added *twelve* other *principal Gods*, who, according to them, preſided each of them over a month, and one of the ſigns of the *Zodiac*.

Theſe were the Gods therefore that, in the *Chaldean aſtrological theology*, attended the *Sun*, and theſe ſeem to be the Gods that, in *Homer*'s ſtyle, waited upon *Jupiter*. *Olympus* is plainly, in this manner of explanation, the *Summer Tropic*, the higheſt part of the Sun's *annual* orbit, his return to which is properly fixed to the 12th *day*, that is the 12th *month* from his departure from it.

The reſult then of what hath here been ſaid, and the paſſage, when ſtript of its poetry, will be this.

The peſtilence fell into the *Grecian* camp a month or two after the *Summer Solſtice*, when the *Sun*, attended by the *Planets* and *Fixt Stars*, was gone towards the *Winter Tropic*, the ſeaſon when the people of *Babylon* and its *territories* celebrated an annual feſtival, and would not return to the *Summer Tropic* till twelve months after his departure from it.

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